

CDC Calls for Temporary Halt for Heart Patients Volunteering for Smallpox Vaccination

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has taken the precautionary step of adding a temporary medical deferral to the smallpox vaccination program for persons who have been diagnosed with heart disease. CDC is investigating whether there is any association between smallpox vaccination and reports of heart problems in seven health care workers who have been vaccinated.

CDC added the temporary measure to the existing list of deferral criteria based on information from its real-time monitoring system, which showed a small number of heart-related incidents among health care workers following smallpox vaccination. It is not clear whether this number is greater than would be expected normally in this population, CDC scientists said.

CDC is recommending that persons with known cardiac disease be temporarily deferred from receiving smallpox vaccination. This would include individuals with the following medical conditions:

- cardiomyopathy
- previous heart attack
- history of angina
- other diagnostic evidence of coronary artery disease

CDC will provide states with simple questions about heart problems to use in screening people volunteering for smallpox vaccination.

In pursuing its promise of safety, last week CDC asked the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' (ACIP) Smallpox Vaccine Safety Review Board to examine reports of heart-related adverse events occurring in connection with the smallpox vaccination program. CDC is also beginning research projects aimed at identifying and understanding any associations that may exist between smallpox vaccine and heart-related problems.

CDC has received several reports of heart-related problems among the 25,645 people who have been vaccinated in the civilian program as of March 23, 2003. The seven cases prompting this precautionary action include three cases of myocardial infarction (heart attack), one of which resulted in death; two cases of angina (chest pain); and two cases of myopericarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle or sac surrounding the heart). In each case the individual's medical history, including risk factors for heart disease, is being studied. California Department of Health Services is not aware of any cardiac events occurring after vaccination in the California civilian vaccination program.

Cases of heart inflammation following smallpox vaccination were reported in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the information from these reports does not provide any information about the types of people who may be at higher risk for heart-related problems following smallpox vaccination.

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